

From Sorrow to Trust

Nehemiah responded to bad news by turning to the Lord in prayer.



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Nehemiah 1:1-11

September 20, 2020

(Nehemiah 1:1-11) ¹The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ²Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. ³They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." ⁴When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. ⁵Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. ⁷We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' ¹⁰"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. ¹¹Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- Share a time when you received some great news. How did you respond? Who did you share it with?
- Share a time when you received some heart-breaking news. How did you respond? Who did you share it with?
- Have you ever been there for others when they received crushing news? How did you respond to their hurt?

The Book of Nehemiah gives the account of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem after the Israelites began to return from their 70 years of captivity in Babylon, also known as the exile. Nehemiah was grieved by what he saw and moved to take action, leading the rebuilding of the walls and the spiritual awakening of the people. He is an example of a person who had Christlike compassion for the needs of others.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer read Nehemiah 1:1-4

- What was the significance of the city of Jerusalem to the Jewish people? What made Jerusalem different than any other city?
- What did Nehemiah's brother report to him about what was going on in Jerusalem?
- Nehemiah responded to the news about Jerusalem by mourning, fasting, and praying for days. Why did he respond in that way? What is the lesson for us from his example? Why must we not discount the differences these things make?
- What did the physical condition of Jerusalem tell Nehemiah about the spiritual condition of the people living there?

In verse 2, Nehemiah's brother Hanani told him of the distress in Jerusalem: The wall around the city was broken down, and the gates were burned down. Nehemiah mourned the report from his brother, because the news told Nehemiah more about the spiritual condition of Jerusalem than the physical condition of its walls. Jerusalem was a hub of all Jewish religious activity. For the walls to be in the state they were meant the people had neglected to honor and worship the Lord. Nehemiah didn't respond with an immediate, multi-step strategy to fix the walls; instead, he fasted and prayed before God (v. 4).

Have a volunteer read Nehemiah 1:5-11

- **What was the content of Nehemiah's prayer? Was it more focused on God or on Nehemiah's individual requests? Why do you think he prayed as he did?**
- **What did Nehemiah's prayer reveal about the character of God? What about Nehemiah's character? What was the connection between Nehemiah's spiritual life and his ability as a leader?**
- **How did Nehemiah use Scripture in His prayer? Have you ever prayed this way? Why should we incorporate Scripture into our prayers?**
- **Nehemiah ended his prayer with a personal request. What did Nehemiah ask for? What would it look like for you to pray similarly in your daily life?**
- **Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. What were the responsibilities of his position, and why was this significant?**

Nehemiah's prayer in these verses was not only rooted in his many requests, but also in the character of God. Nehemiah had great confidence in who God was and all He had done. A high view of God always leads to a humble view of ourselves. The prayer was also rooted in the story of Scripture. Nehemiah understood his place in God's story and acknowledged his helplessness before God. The smallest portion of Nehemiah's prayer was his request for himself as he went before the king. Being a cupbearer meant Nehemiah tested every piece of food that went to King Artaxerxes to ensure the king wasn't poisoned. This was a prominent position, especially considering Nehemiah was a foreigner. Nehemiah was faithful in small things, and God used him to make a big difference.

Nehemiah knew that the true problem wasn't a broken-down city filled with broken-down people. The true problem was a broken-down relationship with God. Nehemiah was called to rebuild a city and a community of people in shambles. Because of the exile, Jerusalem was in need of both physical and spiritual renewal.

Nehemiah's prayer addresses a covenant-keeping God of steadfast love, a God who has redeemed his people (Neh. 1:10). Nehemiah is referring to God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt, but that rescue pictures the greater One to come, not through the blood of a sacrificed lamb but through the death and resurrection of Christ, "our Passover Lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7).

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- **Nehemiah used the vocation God had given Him as cupbearer to the king to make an eternal impact. How could God use you in the place He has put you for the glory of His name?**
- **Nehemiah prayed desperately because he believed God heard and answered prayers. What God-sized things would you like to see happen in our church over the next year?**
- **What is one small step of obedience you could take to engage God's mission this week?**

PRAYER: Praise God for using ordinary people for His extraordinary purposes. Pray that God would help you obey Him day by day in simple steps of obedience. Thank God for being who He is. Confess your need for God's presence every day.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Nehemiah 7-8

DAY 2 – Nehemiah 9

DAY 3 – Nehemiah 10

DAY 4 – Nehemiah 11

DAY 5 – Nehemiah 12

KEY VERSE: Nehemiah 8:10

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.

Explain what the text means.

Apply the verse to your life.

Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God's Story. Visit chetscreek.com/gods-story for videos, study guides, and more.

OUR VISION

To be a church
for the unchurched,
here and around the world.

ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW
GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a
way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

1:1-4. In both the Hebrew and the Greek Old Testament, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a single book. Yet the connection between them is rather abrupt and without any real transition. Nehemiah, whose name means "Yahweh has comforted," is identified as son of Hacaliah, to distinguish him from other people named Nehemiah (Neh. 3:16; 7:7; Ezra 2:2) in the same era. Hanani is described by Nehemiah as "one of my brothers." While this could be used loosely to refer to his Jewish companions, it probably means his literal brother due to the mention of Hanani in 7:2. The people in the province of Judah (v. 2), which the Persians called Yehud, were suffering because their city was in such terrible condition. Many scholars maintain that Nehemiah's response (v. 4) suggests this was a recent development, possibly referring to Rehum's opposition (Ezra 4:9-16). The translation of the verbs here, "has been broken down... have been burned," reinforces this understanding of the passage. Nehemiah's response was like that of his predecessor, Ezra (Ezra 9:3-5), who humbled himself before God.

1:5-11. Nehemiah's prayer, while shorter than Ezra's (see Ezr 9:6-15), is also written in late biblical Hebrew style found in other penitential prayers of that era (Neh. 9:5-37; Dan. 9:4-19). Like them, it reflects the language of Deuteronomy, acknowledging that Israel's adversities had resulted from the nation's covenant unfaithfulness, and that their present survival was due solely to God's abundant mercy.

1:5-6. Addressing God as "Yahweh, the God of heaven" is not common in the Old Testament, but it does occur several other times (Gen. 24:7; 2 Chron. 36:23; Jonah 1:9). This description of God is similar to the opening verse of Daniel's prayer: "the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands" (Dan. 9:4). Like Ezra (Ezra 9:6), Nehemiah also identified with the sin of his people, confessing that "both I and my father's house have sinned."

1:8-9. Nehemiah alluded to Moses' warning (Deut. 4:27; 28:64) that God would scatter Israel among the peoples if they were unfaithful to the covenant, and then he summarized God's promise through Moses (Deut. 30:1-5) that repentance would bring restoration (Neh. 1:9). Repentance is described as "return to Me," using the primary Old Testament term for repentance that depicts a turning from sin toward God.

1:10. Just as Moses had interceded for his sinful people, reminding God that Israel was His people whom He had brought out of Egypt (Ex. 32:11), so too Nehemiah reminded God that they were His servants and His people whom He had redeemed.

1:11. The reference to "this man" has led some scholars to suggest impropriety on Nehemiah's part for referring to King Artaxerxes in such a way. But the context here is a private prayer addressed to God who knew very well who "this man" was and that Nehemiah would need divine help in dealing with him. The Persian rulers were famous for the irrevocability of their laws, as Daniel discovered when the "law of the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 6:8,12,15) was brought against him. Nehemiah faced the daunting task of asking Artaxerxes to reverse his previous proclamation (Ezra 4:23) stopping all construction in Jerusalem. Only at the end of the prayer does it become clear why a Jewish man like Nehemiah thought he would ever get to address the Persian king. The cupbearer was not only responsible for choosing appropriate wines for the king, but he tasted them himself to assure they were not poisoned.